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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of volunteer teacher associates in school reform. Three theses are examined: (1) qualified and well trained volunteers as teachers' associates can be important in remedying the difficulties students experience in public school classrooms; (2) many public school reform efforts produce mixed results because of difficult assignments, commitments, and constraints on school "insiders" and "outsiders"; and (3) professors of education can play significant roles in developing and using teacher-volunteer teams. Qualified volunteers trained as teacher associates can provide ongoing classroom assistance in crucial areas at minimal cost, with no additional personnel, curriculum changes, consultants, or additional space. These areas include: student affirmation, tutoring/mentoring, small group facilitation, negotiation/conflict resolution, and enrichment. Teacher associates become aware of both the realities of students lives and of the circumstances facing teachers and administrators, and can play an important role in encouraging appropriate changes in schools as outsiders with an insider's point of view. Volunteer teacher associates could be trained by institutions of higher education in conjunction with their preservice teacher education programs. Training would include observation, classroom sessions, a public school practicum, and two full days each week at a local school. (ND)

VOLUNTEER TEACHERS' ASSOCIATES AS SCHOOL REFORMERS

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INTRODUCTION

The theses of this paper are threefold:

(1) a powerful potential source of remedy for the difficulties some students experience in public school classes lies in enlisting and training qualified volunteers as Teachers' Associates and using them in a special way. The effectiveness of this volunteer effort depends on developing mutual trust and competence of both the cooperating professional teachers and the volunteer teachers' associates through co-training in complementary and supporting roles that are defined, modeled, and relied upon;

(2) many reform efforts aimed at the public schools produce mixed results because there is a different set of assumptions, commitments, and constraints bearing on school "insiders" (students, teachers, administrators, and, many times, school boards) and school "outsiders" (state education boards, legislators, representatives of the business community, many parents, and the public in general). Teachers' Associates have the possibility through working in a voluntary capacity within the schools of reaching across some of the gaps between the "insider" and "outsider" differences in mentality and assumptions and of becoming political bridge-builders between the differing camps, and

(3) professors of education can have a significant stake in this enterprise in cooperatively developing and articulating the instructional modalities using the teacher-volunteer teams, as trainers of both teachers and volunteers in the use of these models, and in continuing liaison with the schools, teachers, and volunteers in the maintenance and evolution of the program.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. DILEMMAS OF STUDENTS

The first assumption that underlies this proposal regards students and their needs. This assumption, not new or novel but sometimes tacitly peripheral to reformist efforts, is that at the heart of many of the dilemmas of students of all ages is the need for a profound, personal affirmation of themselves as human beings in safe settings, in small groups or one-on-one, by adults in their lives. The proponents of a more muscular disciplinary and content emphasis as the goal of reform find this "soft" assumption naive at best and irrelevant at worst. This paper is not the forum to attempt to reformulate this issue in a more holistic and less

parsimonious way. But the "reasons" for or "explanations" of this circumstance as well as complementary ways of healing this breach are available from several different perspectives and more than one frame of reference. Nonetheless, personal affirmation as a key ingredient remains in the recipe of this paper as an assumption.

The student scene viewed by an impressionist painter might picture frenetic movement saturated with brilliant colors without foreground or background, points of focus, or emerging figures. Each of us is familiar in one way or another with the litany of domestic modernity: centrifugal forces caroming family members in various directions at high rates of speed, sporadic or permanent absence of one or more parents for economic or personal reasons, neighborhoods compromised by violence and/or the merchandising and abuse of illicit substances, television's role in fostering "the loss of childhood" and the idealization of consumption, the instability of many familial relationships characterized often by emotional distance if not hostility, and sometimes by emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Students from these homes go daily--or at least sporadically--to schools to be taught and tested until they are processed, or fall out of the process for some reason.

2. DILEMMAS OF TEACHERS

My second assumption concerns the dilemmas of teachers who, more often than not, are painfully aware of their students' lifeworlds and learning needs. But they are also painfully aware of other claims. Parental expectations of the school and teacher can be explicit and unreasonable. Externally mandated student performance levels often translate administratively to teachers as job evaluation criteria. Shrinking resources, high pupil-teacher ratios, student services reductions, and other costcutting measures directly or indirectly affect the classroom teacher's performance and influence classroom climate.

Given these circumstances for the teacher, it is not hard to see from the student's perspective what she/he perceives as a lack of "caring." Nel Noddings quotes James Comer's claim that "the single greatest complaint directed at teachers is 'They don't care!'"[1] A partial antidote to this situation is the presence of trained, sensitive adult volunteers under the leadership of the classroom teacher dealing with individuals and small groups of students in affirming, engaging, and informal but "formatted" ways.

3. POOL OF VOLUNTEERS

The third assumption is that there is a viable and growing pool of potential volunteers who are intelligent, interested, and capable of commitment to serve one or two days a week without pay in many public schools in a structured program that demands more of them and uses their talents in a more challenging way than helping the teacher with paperwork, watching the class while the teacher

takes a needed break, or walking a student to the school nurse.

None of these examples from existing volunteer aide programs are unimportant or unneeded. Indeed, there are many valid modes of volunteer service in the schools and many highly effective programs in all parts of the country. I am in no way advocating the re-invention of an already well-rounded and effectively employed wheel of voluntarism. What I am suggesting is an additional wheel with a little different spin on it. This particular program aims to tap and train some of the growing numbers of able people in American society who want to make meaningful societal contributions more than they want to make a lot of money or raise their level of consumption. No age or economic level is excluded. The growing pool of seniors, many of whom are healthy, intelligent, and energetic is an obvious source.

A possible misconception needs to be prevented at this point. This proposal is not a dusting off of the conservative slogans of the 1980's (and 90's as well!) that pushed voluteerism as a way to save money and shrink the government. Rather, the proposal is advanced as a partial antidote to the stifling depersonalization that occurs at times in spite of all good intentions and gargantuan efforts of teachers. They simply cannot deal with the numbers of students they are responsible for in a climate of increasing external expectations, student needs, and the threat and reality of violence. What if special volunteers could provide a multiplier effect of the teachers they work with such that the teacher's support, influence, and leadership could be extended to many more students? That this could be done at virtually no increase in cost is an important extra and to be valued, especially since cost is a major element in any policy equation. But the primary consideration is and has to be educational effectiveness.

Jeremy Rifkin in The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Work Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era argues that, given the questionable future of the market economy's capacity as employer and the diminishing role of government as "provider of last resort" worldwide, an increasing number of progressive thinkers are taking another look at "the third sector," the volunteer sector, as a contributing force. According to Rifkin, more than 89 million Americans volunteer their time in nonprofit institutions each year with an average of 4.2 hours of service each week per volunteer. This contribution, expressed in dollar terms, represents $182 billion, a significant resource.[2]

4. REFORM POLITICIZED

The fourth assumption of this paper is that one of the major reasons for the limited results of many though not all programs for school reform (or school "reformulation") from site-based management to contracting instructional tasks to the private sector is that many of these programs necessarily get politicized in the

implementation phase. I do not use politicized in any pejorative sense. It is simply a fact of life in complex organizations that power dispersal in effecting change--no matter how consensual or democratic the process of channeling it--requires change on the part of the participants. This is often inconvenient, usually uncomfortable, and sometimes threatening. It may be threatening in unexpected ways even to those who supported the idea originally if they become involved in the implementation phase. It is usually even more so when the implementers have only marginal ownership in the program, but major responsibility for carrying it out.

When praxis is subservient to policy rather than policy arising as the theorizing of praxis, the practitioners often consciously or unconsciously subvert the program and the policymakers cannot understand why the program failed. Hence, I contend, the increasing emphasis in the literature on the teacher as theorist, the teacher as researcher,[3] the teacher as policy participant,[4] etc., rightfully has a political as well as ideological etiology. In other words, power and the way it is disseminated portends reform success or failure as surely as the intrinsic worthiness of the reform proposal.

CONSEQUENCES

What does this mean in everyday terms? For the purposes of this paper, it means that as long as those who are mainly "outsiders" to the schools engineer reform efforts of whatever stripe for the "insiders" to carry out, the outcomes are likely to be mixed at best, no matter how promising the reform efforts are. There is, of course, nothing new or groundbreaking in this claim. Most school administrators know this and accommodate to it, some enthusiastically, some less so.[5] Many school board members know it. This appears to be less true for some state boards of education, legislators, many parents, and a large number of citizens.

Testimony supporting this contention includes several well-intentioned but simplistic efforts that have been mandated to "fix the schools," "stiffen the standards," and "test our way to quality." These are generally imposed by those who stand outside the schools and have scant knowledge of the context in which today's schools operate, the particularities of student populations, the multiple intelligences of students, larger school-going constituencies, varied familial and experience backgrounds of students, and the human, physical, and fiscal resources (or lack thereof) of the schools.

This is not a claim that public schools belong to educators any more than medicine in the broadest sense belongs to physicians. This is as false as the catchy non-thought that education is too important a matter to leave to the educators. Nor is it a proposal

to blur the clear line of accountability for mutually agreed-upon outcomes which public education holds in our American tradition as a public trust. The real trouble starts when we try to hammer out the meanings of these facile statements situationally in a time when the traditional narrative of public schooling is necessarily being recast.[6]

A MODEST PROPOSAL

The proposal of this paper is that qualified volunteers, intentionally and jointly trained with selected public school teachers as Teachers' Associates, can provide ongoing classroom assistance in five areas which help to address directly the dilemmas already enumerated. This could be done at minimal cost with no additional paid personnel, no altering of curriculum, no hired consultants, and no additional space.

Secondarily, and of almost equal importance perhaps in the long run, these Associates who come as interested school "outsiders" would be given the opportunity to experience first hand the ethos, cultures, strengths and weaknesses, dilemmas, and possibilities of real students from the neighborhoods, homes, and families which make up the school's constituency. The socio-economic realities of "the street," poverty, abandonment, crime, violence, teen pregnancy, drugs and hopelessness can be experienced first hand. The obverse, which is often omitted in reports, can also be seen for oneself--the diligence, pride, loyalty, sacrifice, service, optimism, talent, and parental dedication which are also present.

Concurrently, Associates undergo what it means to teach in these circumstances with all the internal and external constraints and barriers as well as the satisfactions and fulfillment which are not easily represented even by talented narrators. In short, they would have a taste of being an "insider" in a real school.

A cadre of these Associates, over time, could bring a strong dose of reality to the unrealistic expectations and demands as well as the cobbled panaceas that promise to achieve these goals which school boards, businesses, citizen's special interest groups, students, and other parents are occasionally tempted by. As "outsider-insiders" they could play a political role of considerable importance and credibility in discouraging unlikely schemes and encouraging appropriate changes in schools.

Since they would not be on the payroll, they could have a certain degree of freedom from intimidation and from special interest pleading. Since they would have only the power of their own experience and presence they would not have the encumbrance of any constituency other than the students and their teachers, and even this relationship would be an informal and voluntary one. At

the same time, by virtue of their experience, they would, depending on their abilities, sensitivity, and commitment, have the opportunity to speak to issues and influence "outsider" groups in ways that teachers would be less effective at because of their suspected self-interest or their own fear, real or imagined, of intimidation or retribution at the hands of school authorities at whatever level.

QUALIFICATIONS AND ROLES

What are the qualifications sought in persons to be recruited and trained for these roles? There is considerable information available on the diverse roles and scope of volunteer groups of all kinds in school settings and outside them. Hospitals, hospices, AIDS support services and individual care services, grief, illness, and impairment support groups of all sorts, home healthcare assistance, special service groups such as, for example, Parents Reaching Out ("an incorporated, nonprofit community-based organization of parents and health care providers whose goal is to see that families experiencing a high risk pregnancy or the birth of a critically ill or premature baby do not face the experience alone")[7], long-term care volunteer groups, Alzheimer's patients volunteer sitters' groups to provide respite for family caregiver , and many others.

There is also literature available on the use of volunteers, especially in hospitals, to free health professionals to do other tasks.[8] The use of volunteers in public schools in numerous forms from visiting artists, dramatists, musicians, gardeners, craftspersons and special activity experts of all sorts to tutors, mentors, grandparents' reading groups, variable grade buddy programs, etc., is common, successful, and has been for years. Volunteers in school libraries, lunch programs and as bus monitors, laboratory helpers, shop assistants, and many, many other roles are certainly not new.

The type of volunteers recruited as Teachers' Associates is tied closely to the multiplicity of functions which they could perform. Students, I am persuaded, need to see these adults in a multiplicity of roles if the volunteers are to be dealt with as whole persons and not just as the "carriers" or "doers" of functions. If Ms Brown, for example, is to be effective as an Associate she cannot be perceived by Harlan as a "tutorial function" who, incidentally, may have other interests and dimensions to her life which are quite peripheral and secondary to what she is doing while she is helping him. She must be met, instead, as a real, whole adult whose complexity, cohesion, and integration are paramount. This whole person is voluntarily and willingly "present" to Harlan, doing a particular task to be sure, but all there in the moment.

In addition to the undivided attention which an Associate needs to give to whatever student or group she/he is working with, wholeness and presence as a person rather than a functionary can be fostered further for students who see the volunteers only one or two days a week by seeing them doing different tasks and performing different roles from time to time. Ms Brown is not just a math tutor, she is also good at making a small group work cohesively and smoothly, she can help settle disputes, she uses her hobby of photography in the class and shares her skills, etc. For students to see this diversity coupled with an unwavering sense of personal presence and focus on task (which really means focusing on Harlan on task) is to experience an adult richness, complexity, and centeredness which many children and young people are missing in the fragmented associations they have with taut adults who are only half there when they are there, or who are only there with the child to get through some crisis, issue some warning for the future, get some closure.

Experiencing an adult, if one is a child, is a lot more than getting closure. A lot of the talk about adult role models is shallow, I contend, because the child's "being" with an adult requires that the adult <u>be there</u> with all his faculties focused. Many of us postmodern "saturated selves," to use Kenneth Gergen's felicitous phrase[9], are so constantly dispersed that it is difficult for us to know how to be anywhere in a centered, "available" way.

What I am contending here is that "presence" and "complexity" are the two prime requisites for Teachers' Associates. Presence, as I am using it, is the ability and decision to focus the whole person rather than perform a function in a detached, automatic, or even skilled but unmindful way. Complexity, as I am using it, is the willingness of the person to let someone see the kaleidoscope of the adult self demonstrated in different tasks, methods, and manners. Presence is "being there." Complexity is "being all there." Presence, here constructed, is not the opposite of absence; it is the opposite of half-heartedness. Complexity, here constructed, is not the opposite of simplicity; it is the opposite of hiddenness. Persons who have the capacity to be present to students in all that this entails and to be whole with students in all that this entails are the Associate recruits to be sought.

What are the roles Associates can in conjunction and concurrence with the classroom teacher assume in one instructional configuration or another? There are at least five <u>direct</u> ones and one <u>indirect</u> one.

(1) Student affirmation. This is the primary focus of the Associate's role. In both formal and informal activities the volunteer gives attention to, acceptance of, and association

with individual students as needed through various interactive modalities.

(2) Tutoring/mentoring. The Associate, under the direction of the teacher, tutors students one-on-one or in small groups using the methods, materials, programs, and software used in that school and particular classroom.

(3) Small group facilitation. The Associate uses small group facilitation and team building skills so that she/he can work with one or more groups, whether they are interest groups, focus groups, skill development groups, inquiry groups, project groups, or groups with other purposes.

(4) Negotiation/conflict resolution. The Associate, when asked by the teacher, can play various roles directly or indirectly related to class management. The ability to take a disruptive student out of the classroom, for example, and work through an acceptable "settlement" could be done by the Associate while the class continues without further interruption.

(5) Enrichment. The flexibility to use the interests, skills, special knowledge, hobbies, relationships, experience, etc., which the Associate brings to the class can add a dimension of enrichment which is personal, unique, and engaging to students.

A sixth function, the political and reformist one, is not a direct classroom function and has already been discussed.

TRAINING ASSOCIATES, TEACHERS, AND PROFESSORS

Classroom teachers, volunteers, and professors of education all have a significant stake in quality preparation of Teachers' Associates. Many variations are possible for training these groups, but any scheme must involve all three parties: teachers, Associates, and faculty member. Greater success is likely in a field-based plan located in the school rather than the university. Professor and classroom teachers serve as models in the five formats of the program. Exchanging roles periodically keeps the expectations real on everyone's part, and dramatizes the contribution each makes. It also fosters a sense of colleagueship and discourages prima donnas and pecking orders.

I have idealized the program in the following way. Five Associates and five cooperating teachers are enrolled in a university course that is designed to give the teachers graduate credit and the Associates graduate, undergraduate, or Continuing Education Unit credit, as appropriate to their needs and qualifications and how much flexibility the host university offers. The inclusion of an additional teacher and Associate hedges against attrition and allows some flexibility in substituting due to

illness or other contingencies.

It is assumed that during the training period the Associates and professor will spend two full days each week in the school, which time will be used for observation, instruction, practica, and critique. Prior to any didactic session each teacher assigns a student to be observed in his/her class by one of the Associates. The teacher briefs the Associate in the use of a simple protocol sheet giving the Associate clues as to what to look for as she/he observes.

The pattern is (1) observation, (2) didactic session, (3) teacher-Associate practicum in the class while the professor teaches the public school students, and (4) Associate-teacher-professor three-way debriefing and critique. This pattern is rotated through all five formats (student affirmation, tutoring-mentoring, small group facilitation, negotiation/conflict resolution, and enrichment) for each of the six teams of teacher-Associates. Alternative patterns using teams of two Associates in a teacher's classroom may be useful as time allows, once the original Associate-teacher-professor cycle is completed. Rotation of roles may also occur so that the Associate and teacher, for example, can see how the professor practices what she preaches in a different setting than a graduate class.

The topics of the observation, didactic, practicum, and debriefing/critique sessions are integrated so that the cue sheet for observation in the student affirmation section, for example, sets the stage for the college class session on the topics and class activities on "being present," listening skills, observation skills, and affirmation skills. The three-person classroom practicum with students enacts affirmation issues and skills. The debriefing/critique targets what happened in the practicum. The same procedure applies to each of the five major topics.

The suggested topics with suggested sub-topic divisions are listed below.

1. Student affirmation
   a. Being present
   b. Listening skills
   c. Observation skills
   d. Affirmation skills

2. Tutoring/mentoring
   a. Structures of knowledge
   b. Multiple intelligences
   c. Instructional modes
   d. The school's tutorial resources and their uses

3. Small group facilitation
   a. Group types and functions
   b. Framing issues and questions
   c. Functional roles
   d. Fostering goal-oriented participation

4. Negotiation/conflict management
   a. Crisis management
   b. Conflict management with children and youth
   c. Negotiation
   d. The art of compromise ("satisficing")

5. Enrichment
   a. Discovering uniqueness
   b. Recognizing and encouraging creativity
   c. Your gifts
   d. Sharing as a pedagogical model

I mentioned early in this paper the necessity of developing trust of each other on the part of both volunteers and teachers if maximum benefit is to be derived from a Teachers' Associates program. This cooperative educational experience, given sensitive leadership and reasonably "healthy" participants, can go a long way toward establishing professional and personal trust among colleagues to meet some of the knotty urban challenges many schools face. Or, to put it more personally and probably more honestly, to help those of us in schools to "meet" each other for the sake of humane learning.

More tangible benefits of a volunteer Teachers' Associate may include some or all of the following:

1. Her presence can change the class chemistry.
2. She can mitigate the effects of a high pupil-teacher ratio.
3. He can foster a sense of community.
4. He can assist in multi-task grouping.
5. She can change the class management possibilities.
6. She can give special, individual attention to "problem" students.
7. He brings another set of interests and abilities to the instructional mix.
8. He provides the teacher with an in-class colleague.

In summary, a Teachers' Associates program offers a structured way to provide adult mentors for children and youth who may already be disenchanted (if not cynical) about the whole "school thing;" raise the morale of hardworking, sometimes unappreciated classroom teachers whose burnout rate may reflect loss of professional and personal meaning as much as weariness in coping with hostile and occasionally violent clienteles; and, perhaps most important, bring another caring, attentive adult into the daily lives of young people who, for a cascade of societal, familial, cultural,

economic, and personal reasons need the focused attention of a significant adult for learning to improve.

1.Witherell, C., & Noddings, N. (1991). Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education. New York: Teachers College Press, 165.

2.Rifkin, J. (1995). The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Work Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era. New York: G.P. Putnam Sons.

3.van Manen, M. (1990). Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy. London, Ontario: Althouse Press.

4.Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (1986). Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research. Philadelphia: Falmer Press.

5.Hirschhorn, L. (1991) "Organizing Feelings Toward Authority: A Case Study of Reflection in Action" in Schon, D.A. (ed). The Reflective Turn: Case Studies in and on Educational Practice. New York: Teachers College Press, 111-125. Although this article deals with a case study of a psychoanalytically informed consulting practice, its applicability to teachers is high because it focuses on people's reactions to authority in organizational life generally. The author contends that for organizational life to "improve" (or, in our terms, "reform" to succeed), "a more complicated psychological understanding of work life" must evolve, "one that pays close attention to the psychodynamics of feelings as well as the exercise of apparently rational judgments and the pursuit of manifest interests." 111.

6.Postman, N. (1995). The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School. New York: Alfred A. Knopf

7.Napier, A. (April, 1995). "A Volunteer's Story: Parents Reaching Out" in Tennessee Nurse. 58(2):19

8.Kolber, R. (Dec. 1991). "Establishing a volunteer program: freeing nurses to provide nursing care," in Recruitment and Retention Report. 4(12):3-6. This is a representative sample of this literature.

9.Gergen, K.J. (1991). The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life. New York: Basic Books.